Presentation: Designated Housing Interviews
September 2014
We conducted 20+ informational interviews to learn more about the housing needs of elderly and NED population

Over the course of 2 months, we conducted a series of phone interviews with the elderly and non-elderly disabled population in the Greater Boston area in order to learn about:

- Specific living preferences and requirements
- The housing search and application process as well as alternative housing options
- The size and needs of each respective population

We conducted over 20 interviews with BHA residents and BHA current/former applicants as well as experts from the following organizations:

- City of Boston’s Elderly Commission
- City of Boston’s Commission for Persons with Disabilities
- Hearth, Inc.
- HomeStart, Inc.
- Boston Medical Center's Elders Living at Home Program (ELAHP)
- Ethos
- Massachusetts Association of Older Americans
- Boston Center for Independent Living

We discovered structural and systematic disadvantages that the elderly face throughout the application process
A number of factors add structural difficulties to the elderly throughout the application process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Filter throughout housing application</th>
<th>Elderly / NED difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualify for BHA unit</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>The elderly are more likely to continue living in unsafe/unreasonable alternatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choose to apply to the BHA</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>The elderly are more geographically constrained</td>
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<tr>
<td>Able to live in available geographies</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>The elderly are concerned about living with the non-elderly disabled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choose to live in mixed age demographic housing</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td>The elderly need more help accessing the application process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Put together strong application</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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Elderly applicants are less likely to successfully complete an application, and less likely to be represented on waiting lists.
### Seniors often stay in unsafe / unreasonable housing

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Supporting quotes</th>
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| • Seniors will stay in housing that is unsustainably expensive  
• Seniors will stay with acquaintances that offer no stability  
• Seniors will stay in nursing homes or hospitals | "I stayed with a friend of 20 years, and it was just kind of either I will sleep on the couch or you will sleep on the couch [...] he is a drunk, so it didn’t go smoothly."  
- Marian, BHA Elderly Resident |

### Many housing alternatives for seniors are not viable

- It is more difficult to get seniors to go through the necessary application steps  
- Seniors often “feel hopeless and don’t see the point”

### However, seniors often fail to seek out better housing options

- NED can apply within BHA along different paths  
  – MassHealth’s vouchers are transferable between institutions  
  – Family housing  
- NED can apply to disabled-specific organizations outside of the BHA

### Elderly options are more limited than NED

- "There are more waitlists that disabled people can apply, meaning that they have more options."
  
- Boston area homeless advocate
## Seniors are geographically constrained

### Comments

- Many have had a long-standing history with their particular surroundings, often living at a particular location for decades
  - Familiarizing oneself to new locations can be daunting for the elderly
- The elderly often currently live with or nearby to existing family members
- The elderly tend to be slower to mobilize than the NED
  - After being on a waitlist for 2-5 years, they may need to re-evaluate their ability to mobilize

### Supporting quotes

- “I’ve recently moved into a new apartment and familiarized myself with the new environment. It was a big hassle for me; even if BHA offered me a better apartment, I wouldn’t consider it.”
  - Lunie, BHA Elderly Applicant

- “I felt that I was in danger if I were to live higher than the second floor or in a building far away from my hospital.”
  - Dulce, elderly applicant who refused unit

- “I had no preference for any geographic location. I was going to one hospital before, and was able to continue going there.”
  - Michael, non-elderly disabled resident

- “Many elderly residents have to plan for the service planning of moving to a new location. You can’t just call them up one day and move them.”
  - Boston area elderly advocate

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### Their geographic constraint limits their housing application

- Location preferences tend to be neighborhood specific
- Those currently living in nursing homes require close coordination to successfully move out
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| • BHA’s housing policy of mixing the elderly and NED populations have resulted in many complaints regarding substance abuse and mental illness  
• Elderly individuals have expressed a stronger concern for safety than the NED and tend to associate the younger population with drugs and crime  
• Some conflicts are not population specific, but instead specific personal issues, such as noise level and rowdiness | “My first and foremost concern is safety. [There are some drug users in my building]…My fear is what happens when their money runs out, what happens then?”  
- Marian, BHA Elderly Resident |
| These concerns cause seniors to not submit applications | “Disabled people have common needs and [if they had separate housing] could have common resources to share.”  
- Boston area public official for disabled issues |
| • The elderly are frightened to apply and/or live with the NED  
• The differences in lifestyle causes tension within the communities | “The mix of elderly and disabled creates environments that alarm elders and prevent the a cohesive living community.”  
- Boston area elderly advocate |
Seniors need more help with the application process

**Comments**

- Application support is available from advocates at shelters, but seniors disproportionately avoid shelters.
- Most applications are only in English and 20% of Boston’s elderly population know little to no English.

**Supporting quotes**

“Many elderly people hang up on us when we mention shelters.”
- Boston area public official for elderly issues

**Comments**

- The already “overwhelming and discouraging” process is magnified for the elderly population.
- The long wait is a barrier to apply for the senior population.

**Supporting quotes**

A lot of seniors don’t apply to the BHA. They feel hopeless, saying "by the time they get to my name, I will be dead."
- Boston area public official for elderly issues

**Comments**

- While NED face “threshold” issues for basic requirements (eg. accessibility), the elderly lack an understanding and awareness of the application process.
- The NED also have a better grasp of preference points.

**Supporting quotes**

“I applied on my own. The application was pretty straight forward. I think anyone in the disabled population who needs it, knows about it and applies for it.”
- William, BHA NED Resident